

HR

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■ **Our agency has started the layoff process and everyone senses the anxiety and fear. People are shocked even though this has been discussed for a while. What's my role as a supervisor in this situation? What's the best way for me to act? There's nothing I can say to make things better. Can the EAP advise me?**

There is no prescribed "best way" to act that will guarantee easy management during a layoff. Every work culture is different and requires supervisors to behave in ways that will complement it. Your goal is to help employees face the event and remain effective while still employed. Yes, talk to the EAP about how to help employees manage feelings of shock, fear, and uncertainty. Also follow guidelines your agency has established and know how it wants you to support employees. Make yourself present for the employees. Acknowledge that this is a difficult time and let them know you'll support them any way you can. Listen to your employees, but advise sparingly and don't plan on saying something profound that will magically make hard feelings and fear go away. Don't try to hide your own shock and concern. If it's genuine and you are managing it, employees will feel free to experience concern but still be able to do the job that needs to be done. Remember, the EAP is available to see individuals and also offers presentations that address working during troubling times such as those currently being experienced.

■ **I supervise an employee who doesn't have good self-esteem and gets picked on by a couple of co-workers. Could the EAP help this employee learn how to be more assertive and stand up to these co-workers?**

Your employee may or may not have poor self esteem and may or may not benefit from assertiveness training. The behavior you describe is a matter of inappropriate workplace conduct and must be addressed as such. Teasing or "picking on" a co-worker should be viewed as a health and safety issue—as real as bad brakes on a delivery truck or a loose handrail on a staircase. Destructive interpersonal behavior can create health consequences, including anxiety, depression, and even post-traumatic stress disorder for the targeted employee. The EAP has an intervention role to play in helping employees affected by such behavior or in helping employees stop harmful relationship patterns when they are identified by management. It may be helpful to consult with an EA Professional about addressing the unacceptable behavior you have described, as well as how to make an EAP referral.

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■ **How can supervisors communicate more effectively to help improve job performance issues?**

One key way to help employees improve job performance is by tailoring your communication to match their motivational triggers. Employees are motivated primarily by either intrinsic or extrinsic values. Intrinsic values include goal achievement, doing a job well, or garnering recognition. Extrinsic values may be reflected by such statements as “If I don’t do my job well, I may not get a raise” or “If I don’t perform well, others will complain.” A combination of these factors often motivates employees, but a predominant style can usually be identified. Take time to learn what motivates your employees and you’ll improve your communication in ways that will increase their productivity. When communicating about performance, be sure to describe what changes you expect so employees know what you want. Some employees need visual communication—a written note from you or a diagram, for example. Others need more discussion and verbal processing to grasp the results you want from them. And the simplest rule of all: Ask your employees what communication works best for them. They’ll tell you.

■ **Following my supervisor referral, I received a phone call from the EAP informing me that my employee failed to show for his EAP appointment. I think his refusal to go is foolish. Should I tell the employee what I think? His performance has improved since I made the referral and for the moment, at least, is fine.**

You should continue to focus on your employee’s job performance. Provide support and feedback on the changes he makes. Identify improvements that are still needed. Refusing a referral to the EAP may not be a good idea, but you are not able to make this determination absolutely. The employee may be genuinely concerned about a personal problem he’s having, but he may not be comfortable seeking help from the EAP or he may be using another professional resource. An EAP assessment often leads to effective referrals for employees, but ultimately an employee must decide what he or she will do to improve job performance. Sometimes employees don’t contact the EAP because they feel certain that different routes to the resolution of their problems exist. Your role as supervisor is critical now. Your focus on performance and insistence that changes are permanently forthcoming may be the only way the employee is eventually led to seek assistance the EAP can offer.

■ **I have an employee who I suspect has a low IQ. It is almost impossible to discuss unsatisfactory performance and anticipate corrections. It makes no sense to impose a disciplinary action, and “warnings” don’t work. Can the EAP help? I don’t see how.**

If your employee is not performing satisfactorily and your efforts to correct performance have not worked to bring about improvement, make a referral to the EAP. Trying to determine the personal problems or to explain them by way of a low IQ can lead you to question whether an EAP referral would be of any value. Even if your employee has special challenges with learning disabilities, other factors may contribute to the struggles he or she faces. The EAP will attempt to identify those issues, and if a decision for dismissal is ever considered, you will be able to document that available remedies, such as the EAP, were afforded to assist your employee improve job performance problems.

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